

COMPENSATION CONNECTION

A Federal Employees' Compensation Newsletter

FY 97-1

OWCP Region IX - San Francisco

August 1997

FEDERAL WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Update on What you Need to Know



NEXT TIME YOU CALL US, TRY IVR!

We recently switched over to our new automated telephone information system, Interactive Voice Response (IVR). We're still at the same telephone number: 415-975-4090. However, now, IWs, EAs, and Medical Providers can access automated information about compensation checks, the next periodic roll payment, medical/hospital bills, physical therapy authorizations, and general information, such as how to file claims, submit bills, and change addresses. IVR also provides the option of contacting the CE assigned to a case, a Bill Resolution Clerk, or an Operator. See the handout *When You Call, Try Our New IVR*.

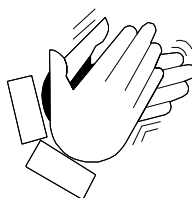
The key to using IVR is the IW's OWCP case file number, so make sure you know it when you call!



ACCESS CLAIMS DATA VIA AQS!

The OWCP Agency Query System (AQS) is now available over the Internet to authorized personnel in EAs. The AQS is a secure Internet site that provides access to information on FEC injury claims. The information available includes current claim status, compensation payment history, and medical bill payment history. Due to Privacy Act considerations, Federal agencies should not request more specific information over the Internet. Rather, call or write us. See attached chart with mailing addresses.

If an EA wants access to AQS, contact your agency headquarters for information on their policy on access for individual users. If you do not know who to contact, call or send an e-mail message to the OWCP National Office for this information (e-mail wfc@fenix2.dol-esa.gov or call 202-219-6486). See attached information about AQS.



COMING SOON... OUR OWN WEB SITE!

Yes, soon, you will be able to "surf the net" and find us at our Internet/www site @:

<http://www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/contacts/owcp/9sf.htm>

From this home page location, you will be able to access helpful information about OWCP Region IX - San Francisco, including information about the FEC Program and our FEC District Office. It's all just a "click" away.

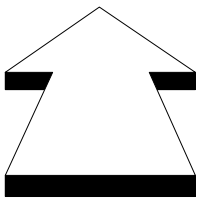
Our web site will also link you to valuable reference information located at the National OWCP web site, including FECA, regulations, procedures, and nontechnical publications, such as *Injury Compensation for Federal Employees - A Handbook for Federal Employees* (Publication CA-810). We will also post this issue of *Compensation Connection*.

Until our OWCP Region IX - San Francisco web site is posted, go ahead and take a look at the National OWCP Internet - www site @:

http://www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/owcp_org.htm

***Look for us to be on the Internet/www
by early August!***

Important: See "Acronym Assistance on p. 2 for a listing of acronyms used in this issue of *Compensation Connection*."



INTERNET ACCESS... AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATIONS LINK

On May 29, we sent letters to approximately 100 top EA officials to advise them about AQS access and our plans for our regional Internet site. We encouraged the officials to obtain Internet access for their ICS' and authorization for access to AQS.

AQS can save time and enable EAs to better manage their workers' compensation cases!

Not only is Internet access the basis for using AQS, but it is also critical to our future communication plans (see article below). So, it is important for EAs to join us in linking to the "information superhighway"! If you don't have Internet access yet, we encourage you to request it from your superiors.



FAREWELL COMPENSATION CONNECTION - HELLO WEB SITE!

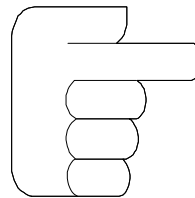
This will be our last issue of *Compensation Connection*. In the future, our regional web site and the information available on OWCP's National web site, will function as the main sources of general information about the FEC Program for IWs, EAs, Unions, and other interested parties. We will update the regional web site periodically to announce procedural changes, new initiatives, and technological enhancements and to keep you informed about the goings on in OWCP Region IX - San Francisco.

Again, we encourage you to obtain access to the Internet, if you do not already have it. If you are not able to obtain access and want to receive updates of our web site via fax or e-mail, contact the Claims Manager for the geographic Claims Section with jurisdiction over your agency's location to make these arrangements.



ACRONYM ASSISTANCE

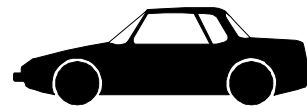
CE	Claims Examiner
DOD	Department of Defense
EA	Federal Employing Agency
FEC	Federal Employees' Compensation
FECA	Federal Employees' Compensation Act
IW	Injured Worker
ICS	Injury Compensation Specialist
LBB	Leave Buy Back
OWCP	Office of Workers' Compensation Programs
SSN	Social Security Number
USPS	U.S. Postal Service



HELP US UPDATE OUR LBB ADDRESSES!

ICS': We need your help in updating our list of addresses for sending LBB payments to the EA. Last year, in connection with changes in the LBB procedures, the OWCP National Office surveyed EAs to determine the payroll or other addresses to be used when these payments are issued to the EA. We have since learned that the address list compiled following the survey is incomplete, and some addresses may be incorrect.

See the attached form *Leave Buy Back Address Update*. Please complete this form, and return it to us as soon as possible. State the complete mailing address to be used for LBB payment purposes (same address entered in Item II of new Form CA-7b). If you do not want LBB checks sent to a central payroll or other location, they will be sent to the address determined by the chargeback code. Your cooperation and prompt response are appreciated.

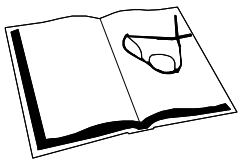


POLICY CHANGE FOR MEAL REIMBURSEMENTS

Consistent with new travel regulations for Federal employees, IWs will no longer be reimbursed for meals obtained during periods of travel lasting 12 hours or less. Where the period of travel lasts between 12 and 24 hours, the IW will be authorized actual expenses up to 3/4 of the per diem rate for the locality of travel based on reasonable charges. Where the period of travel is a full 24-hour day, the IW will be authorized actual expenses up to the entire per diem rate for the locality of travel. EAs will find a notice advising them of this change on the Internet at the OWCP National web site.

IWs are still required to submit receipts for hotels. OWCP will reimburse IWs for meals in the same fashion as Federal employees are reimbursed while on official Government travel, that is , 3/4 of the per diem rate on the first and last day of travel and full per diem for travel on any other days of the trip. With this, there is no requirement for meal receipts. IWs must also continue to submit receipts for taxicabs, regardless of the amount, because of the use of a taxicab is based upon medical need.

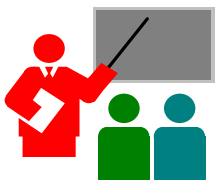
These provisions are effective for travel on or after July 14, 1997.



NEW SELF- INSTRUCTIONAL TRAINING AVAILABLE!

A self-instructional training course for new ICS' is "hot off the press." The course provides introductory information on several topics, including initial review of traumatic injury and occupational disease claims, continuation of pay, controversion of continuation of pay, commonly-used forms and time requirements for submitting them, and basic compensation benefits. There are two booklets: One contains the training material, and the other contains a performance test.

We encourage new ICS' to complete the course. If you are a new ICS, or other EA employee with primary responsibility for processing Federal workers' compensation claims for your EA, and you have not yet attended our 3-day Basic ICS Workshop, complete and return the attached *Self-Instructional Course Enrollment Form*. We will send you the two booklets. Complete the training and the performance test, and send the completed test booklet back to us. We will send you a training certificate. After you complete this course, and have been doing the work for at least 6 months, we advise you to sign up for our 3-day Basic ICS Workshop.



BASIC ICS WORKSHOPS ARE AVAILABLE EACH QUARTER!

We schedule one Basic ICS Workshop per quarter, and all are being held in the OWCP Regional Office in San Francisco.

This classroom training lasts 3 days and is designed to give a broader range of information that will enable EAs to follow proper procedures and control compensation costs. It provides more information on the topics covered in the self-instructional course and also covers third-party liability, permanent partial disability, leave reinstatement, job offers, rehabilitation, loss of wage earning capacity, medical reports, recordkeeping and documentation, and death claims. The workshop also allows ICS' from different agencies to interact, which is an important benefit.

There is no tuition charge for the workshop, and all materials are furnished. However, the EAs must cover travel expenses and per diem costs for their participants. Because the workshops are popular, there are three prerequisites for enrollment: (1) you are the primary person at your EA with responsibility for handling Federal workers' compensation claims, (2) you have been doing this work for at least 6 months, but not more than 18 months, and (3) you intend to continue performing this work for at least the next year. We will consider a combination of FEC experience and completion of the self-instructional course for

enrollment, if you have not performed this work for the full 6 months.

If you meet the prerequisites and want to enroll in a workshop in Fiscal Year 1998 (dates below), complete and return the attached *Basic ICS Workshop Registration Form* to us. We will confirm your registration. If we enroll you, and you are unable to attend for any reason, let us know immediately (typically, we have a waiting list).

Fiscal Year 1998 Workshop Schedule

November 4 - 6, 1997
February 24 - 26, 1998
May 12 - 14, 1998
September 22 - 24, 1998



AGENCY SEMINARS ARE A HIT!

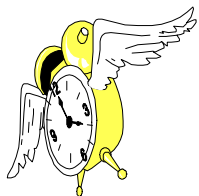
In the first half of 1997, we sponsored three, one-day agency seminars for injury compensation personnel from EAs throughout our region. Space was tight, and there was a great deal of interest. We tried to make sure that participants were experienced injury compensation personnel who had primary responsibility for this function at their EA. We also wanted to make sure that the EAs with the largest numbers of IWs were represented.

We held the first seminar for USPS on January 22. We followed with half-day sessions for DOD on April 24-25 and the same for non-USPS/DOD agencies on May 14-15. Standard topics included AQS, timeliness in submitting key claim forms, maximizing job offers, the new leave buy back procedures, and third party cases. We also had a presentation on "A Day in the Life of a CE," as well as a question and answer panel discussion at the end.

These seminars proved to be a very effective way to update ICS' on key procedures, initiatives, and technological enhancements. In addition, ICS' were able to interact with our staff and each other. The seminars were most beneficial to experienced ICS', that is, those who had already attended our 3-day workshop and had substantial experience with Federal injury compensation.

We were very pleased with the positive feedback. Participants encouraged us to have more of these training seminars. We anticipate scheduling the next seminars for Fall 1997. If you are an experienced ICS and would like to be notified about them, write to OWCP at the address below to **ATTN: Agency Seminar. In addition to your name, job title, EA, address, and telephone number, tell us your fax number and e-mail address.**

Compensation Connection, August 1997, OWCP Region IX - San Francisco, P.O. Box 193769, San Francisco, CA 94119-3769.



PROMPT SUBMISSION OF KEY CLAIM FORMS

On February 21, we sent letters to approximately 100 top EA officials to tell them about OWCP's nationwide initiative to work with EAs to significantly improve their timeliness in submitting key claim forms. We restated the regulatory time requirements and provided them with updated statistics on performance. This was a follow-up letter to one sent in June 1996. In the February letter, we advised the EA officials that the OWCP National Office is sending out "account representatives" to meet with headquarters officials at larger EAs to advise them of performance and discuss steps being taken to improve. The goal is to generate a 50% improvement in submitting these forms within required time frames.

Our focus is on EAs that submit claims to the FEC District Office in San Francisco. Through correspondence, telephone contact, meetings, and training, we are communicating with EA officials and injury compensation staff. The purpose of the contacts is to highlight the timeliness initiative, advise about the regulatory time requirements and the importance of prompt submission of these forms, and provide statistical information on performance.

The statutory and regulatory requirements and guidelines for submitting Forms CA-1, CA-2, CA-7, and CA-8 are discussed in Publication CA-810, Injury Compensation for Federal Employees - A Handbook for Employing Agency Personnel.

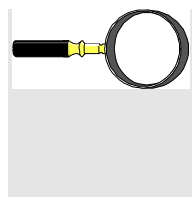
Among many EAs, significant delays in the submission of these key claim forms continue. We believe that timeliness can be improved greatly through such actions as additional agency training for supervisors, review of the EA's internal claims process to remove obstacles to timeliness, and close monitoring by the EA for timeliness. We will continue to monitor the rate of timeliness and keep EA officials advised.

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We encourage EAs to place a special emphasis on improving timeliness in submitting key claim forms.

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RELEASE OF OWCP CASE FILE INFORMATION TO EAS

Privacy Act Considerations

Under the routine use provision of regulations governing release of information under the Privacy Act, EAs are entitled to obtain copies of materials in their employees' compensation files for uses consistent with the reason the information was collected. The EA's use must generally be connected in some way with the injury compensation claim. Such use may, for example, include examining medical reports prior to making an offer of reemployment.

OWCP case files contain material that is sensitive, such as medical reports discussing emotional conditions or substance abuse, and virtually all files contain a substantial amount of information which would likely be considered personal by the subject of the file. Both OWCP and EAs have responsibilities under the Privacy Act with respect to evaluating requests for information and releasing material. EA personnel who work with OWCP cases must be familiar with the restrictions of the Privacy Act and the penalties for violations.

OWCP's goal is to handle records in a manner that is consistent with the Privacy Act but does not impede EAs in their attempts to manage their workers' compensation programs. Guidelines governing release of case file information to EAs are contained in Section 9-1 of Chapter 9, "Agency Management of Compensation Claims" (page 45) in Publication CA-810. We encourage you to review this information.

Office Visits to Review Case Files

Many EAs visit our office to review cases. We typically need 2 weeks to schedule a time and space and obtain the requested cases. Send your request to review cases to OWCP, **ATTN: Agency Case Review**, or call our Contact Representative at 415-975-4252, with a follow up fax to 415-975-4290. Your request must state the date(s) requested, the specific purpose of the review, and the names of the EA representatives who will visit (a photo ID may be requested at the time of the review). Include both name and case number on the list of the cases to be reviewed. Tell us if you will need to discuss the cases with a CE. To expedite matters, use the attached sign-up sheet, *Federal Employing Agency Review of OWCP Case Files*, and fax it to the number noted above.

We make every effort to accommodate EAs' requests; however, please do not assume that the date(s) you request will be available. Wait for confirmation before finalizing your travel plans.